

Corruption and Anti-Corruption

Authors: Lamour P. and Wolanin N. (eds.),

Asia Pacific Press, Canberra, 2001,

pp. 262 including index,

ISBN 0 7315 3660 6

Reviewed by Professor Bob Hughes

Corruption has become a phenomenon which is regarded as universal and yet protean. It is often regarded as the single most serious problem affecting the existence of democratic systems of government. Of course its challenge is not only to democratic governments on the liberal model but, in fact, to any legitimate form of government. It affects not only the so called developing or third world countries, although it might be of particularly serious proportions in them. It is an escalating concern in the developed countries as well. It certainly affects the countries of the South Pacific region in which ongoing problems associated with corruption have repeatedly come to the fore in recent times.

Corruption is not just crime. In that context perhaps the most significant type of corruption is that of bribery, but the concept has broadened to a considerable extent. Most usually it is regarded as criminal activity which is engaged in by public officials and politicians. But arguably there can be private corruption as well. The impetus of many large corporations to eliminate corruption on the part of their managers and employees has, since the mid 1980s been perceived as an appropriate business strategy. No-one wants to do business with or invest in companies which are tainted with corruption. In the public sphere corruption is taken as eroding the very basis of legitimate government. It is divisive, subverts due process and destroys economies and the resources basis of a country. It permits the rich to get richer at the expense of the poorer.

It is true, as Hindess notes in the opening article to this book, (at p. 1) that the predominant view of corruption in the recent past has been that it is an economic phenomenon which therefore links up with issues of development and the like. This view is a misleading one and misses a number of other vital perspectives on corruption which the book then proceeds to explore.

Given that corruption is subject to wide-scale condemnation what is to be done about it. What are its causes and how can it be eliminated? On these issues there is a great diversity of perspectives and theories. This book contains an edited collection of essays exploring these issues. It canvasses varieties of corruption and the rather problematic concern of identifying corruption. The contributing authors, from a variety of different disciplines proceed also to examine many of the approaches taken to either its elimination or its containment. In fact, the question of elimination seems almost impossible.

In the South Pacific context, as I noted, corruption is clearly a phenomenon which has come more and more to the fore in recent times. There are many perhaps (apart from the perpetrators) who would prefer to ignore it or, at least, to downplay its significance. Unfortunately, the corruption perception index

sponsored by Transparency International does not as yet include the Pacific countries amongst those surveyed. But this is no occasion for denial and not can corruption be dismissed on the basis that it is somehow a Western cultural perception used to degrade the cultural norms of less advanced countries. In the Pacific context there are special problems often mentioned such as the difficulty of differentiating between the seemingly legitimate activity of gift giving which is an intrinsic part of many Pacific cultures, on the one hand, and the taking of illicit bribes and 'donations' which influence the outcome of political action and decision-making.

Overall, this book is a most valuable contribution to the discussion and understanding of the phenomenon of corruption in the modern world. Its coverage is very broad. The analyses are sometimes economic sometimes sociological and sometimes political. There is nothing with a particular focus on legal issues, although some essays do touch on the roles of the courts and of legal institutions. The absence of that focus should not be taken as a limitation on the merits of the book.

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